

A SENSE OF HUMOR
ЧУВСТВО ЮМОРА
School of Advanced Studies
Quarter 4, April 20 to June 11, 2020

Instructor/s: Peter Jones p.jones@utmn.ru

Available for consultation via pre-scheduled Zoom appointment

Contact Hours: 64

Type of Course: Elective

Meeting Times: Monday, 16:00-17:30, Tuesday, 16:00-17:30; Wednesday, 16:00-17:30; Saturday, 17:40-19:10.

Related Minors

This course counts toward the minors in Cultural Studies, History and Philosophy.

Course Description

“Humor is... a superior revolt of the mind”
André Breton

Why do we laugh, and can a sense of humor be powerful? Has humor changed over time? How has satire shaped the politics of the contemporary West? Are there limits to what we should make jokes about? Can humor be ethical? What are the differences between a conservative and a progressive joke? And what might dark humor reveal about our inner psyche?

This course will take a broad theoretical and historical approach to humor, exploring the mechanics of comedy through a range of media. Alongside the work of influential philosophers, political theorists, and psychoanalysts, we will hear from stand-up comedians and legendary clowns. We will also watch some of the most celebrated comic movies of the past century, including the work of Charlie Chaplin, Peter Sellers, and Monty Python. We will analyze YouTube videos of political sketches, listen to radio comedy routines, and trawl through internet memes. While attempting to comprehend the power and influence of humor in contemporary Western discourse, we will pay close attention to the political effects of joking. By the end of the course we will have a better sense of how humor can open minds and change hearts, and a sense of how it might, still, alter the course of history.

Course Structure

Each week will consist of four sessions, three of which will be via Synchronous Zoom:

- 1) A 90-minute interactive lecture (Synchronous Zoom)
- 2) A 90-minute seminar / workshop, analyzing the readings for the week (Synchronous Zoom)

- 3) A 90-minute group work session (via Zoom)
- 4) A 90-minute presentation / discussion of group work projects (Synchronous Zoom)

Group work sessions will provide a forum for students to collaborate on a weekly project. The nature of this project will vary from week to week. Students will work in groups of five or six, producing a presentation, a poster, a podcast, or a creative project. These must be coordinated via Zoom, organized by students independently.

Student Learning Goals

Students who successfully pass this course will be able to:

Learning goals	
Knowledge goal:	Understand a range of critical and philosophical approaches to humor and apply these through the analysis of a range of media;
Knowledge goal:	Have a grasp of major debates in the politics and ethics of humor in works of popular culture;
Practical skill:	Analyze humor as it appears in movies and texts; improve skills in group work, essay writing skills, and making presentations.

Required Coursework and Evaluation Criteria

The final grade for this course will be calculated as follows:

Assignment or Task	Due date/s	Percent
Analytical Essay	Week 5	30
Group Work Projects	Weekly	30
24-Hour Test	Week 8	30
Participation	N/A	10

This course employs the 7-average (the average final grade for all students should fall between 6.50 and 7.49) Failing grades (0-3) are included in the calculation of the 7-rule.

All marks are provisional until the end of the course. The 7-rule WILL NOT be used in assessing individual assignments. It will only be applied to the final course marks, pending overall student performance. If general performance is low, a lower overall median/average may apply – if performance is outstanding, a higher overall median may apply.

Analytical Essay (30%)

In this 1500-word essay you will analyze a single humorous work, its politics and its theoretical implications. You may choose a movie or play, a stand-up routine, a tv episode, a comic character, or even (if you can sustain the analysis) a single joke, meme, or moment of satire. Your chosen focus must come from outside of the assigned course material.

Your essay should address the philosophical, theoretical, or political implications of the humor. Who or what is the humor's target? What assumptions need to be shared for the humor to work? How does the humor exclude or include certain communities or individuals? Is the humor conservative, subversive, progressive, or something else? Does it have an ethics? Does it participate in a certain politics? Is it powerful?

Essays will be graded according to the level of engagement with course material, sensitivity to the political or theoretical dimensions of the humor, coherence of argument, and fluency of expression.

Essays will require a full bibliography of works cited, formatted according to Chicago style. For details of this formatting style please refer to:

https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html

24-Hour Test (30%)

You will be sent a series of questions, challenging you to reflect on the major themes and topics of the course. Choosing two of the available questions, you will write long essay answers — typed and formatted in the same way as the analytical essay. Beginning at the time you were sent these questions, you will have 24 hours to submit your answers.

The 24-Hour test will be graded on how well you engage with the course material as a whole, and how well you address the specific implications of the questions. Higher grades will be awarded to students who demonstrate independent analysis, reflecting on the material for themselves and developing an original answer to the question.

Group Work Projects (30%)

Each week will feature a group work assignment. These will involve presentations or creative tasks, to be developed in class periods.

Individuals within each group will be graded separately, according to their participation in both the group work session and the in-class presentation of the project.

Participation (10%)

Students will receive a participation grade corresponding to their contribution in Zoom seminars. It is important to be prepared to discuss the readings each week, and to be ready to answer questions about their content when called upon.

Grades for participation are not based on how often you speak. Instead, they are awarded for the overall quality of your engagement.

Canvas and Other Course Resources

This course has a website on Canvas (<https://canvas.instructure.com/>). You should have received an invitation to join the course on Canvas two weeks before the start of classes. If you did not, double check your SAS email and then follow up with the instructor. All course readings, this syllabus, and any other course materials are available on Canvas.

All written assignments completed outside of class must be submitted via Canvas.

Movie Screenings

For most weeks there will be an optional movie screening, usually in advance of the week's second session. Details of the location of these screenings will be communicated via email. If you are unable to attend for any reason at all, please get in touch with me to arrange for the movie file to be sent to you separately.

Course Literature

Here is a bibliography of literature that will assist you in studying and writing assignments. See the course schedule below for specific reading assignments.

* Indicates Useful Introductory Text

Berlant, Lauren. "Humorlessness (Three Monologues and a Hairpiece)," *Critical Inquiry* 43 (Winter 2017), pp.305–340

* Critchley, Simon. *On Humour* (Routledge, 2002)

Douglas, Mary. "Jokes," in *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London, 1975), pp.90–115

Freud, Sigmund. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (London, Penguin, 2000)

Lecoq, Jacques. *Theatre of Movement and Gesture*

Krefting, Rebecca. "When Women Perform Charged Humour: The (Gendered) Politics of Consumption," in *All Joking Aside*, pp.106–136

McGraw, A. Peter and C. Warren. "Benign Violation Theory," in *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies*, vol.1, pp.75–77.

* Morreall, John. *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009)

Oring, Elliott. "Jokes and the Discourse on Disaster," *The Journal of American Folklore* 100: 397 (1987), pp.276–286.

Petro, Peter. "Issues in Satire Theory," in *Modern Satire: Four Studies* (2015), pp.5–20

Screech, M.A. *Laughter at the Foot of the Cross* (Chicago, 1997)

Sover, Arie (ed.), *The Languages of Humor: Verbal, Visual, and Physical Humor* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018)

* Toplyn, Joe. *Comedy Writing for Late Night TV* (Twenty Lane Media, 2014)

Course Policies and Expectations

Note Taking

Taking good notes is essential, and you are encouraged to use pens, pencils, laptops, ipads, or sketch pads. The only rule is that you pay attention to others who are speaking in class, and stay away from tech distractions.

Readings

It is essential that you come to class prepared to discuss the readings in detail. You are encouraged to make highlights in your PDF copies of the text, to allow you to find and refer to specific passages in class. If it appears you have not done the reading at all, you may be awarded a grade of 0 for your participation that week.

Examination Format

The examination consists of a 90-minute test that includes the identification of ten quotations from required course readings and a written essay. For full details on the format and grading, see the SAS policies section below.

Course Schedule

NOTE: *This is provisional — readings and movies are liable to change before class begins.*

Week	Date	Activity	Topics & Readings	Assignments
0	13.04-19.04	-	No classes	-
1	20.04	Lecture	What is Humor?	
	21.04	Seminar	What is Humor? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simon Critchley, <i>On Humour</i> (London: Routledge, 2002), ch.1 • Lauren Berlant, "Humorlessness (Three Monologues and a Hairpiece)," <i>Critical Inquiry</i> 43 (Winter 2017), pp.305–340 *** (Optional)*** 	
	22.04	Group Work	What is Humor?	
	25.04	Discussion Session	What is Humor?	

2	27.04	Lecture	Jokes Movie: <i>Airplane</i> (1979)	Group Project 1
	28.04	Seminar	Jokes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mary Douglas, “Jokes,” in <i>Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology</i> (London, 1975), pp.90–115 • Elliott Oring, “Jokes and the Discourse on Disaster,” <i>The Journal of American Folklore</i> 100: 397 (1987), pp.276–286. 	
	29.04	Group Work	Jokes	
	2.05	Discussion Session	Jokes	
3	4.05	Lecture	Bodies / Slapstick Movie: <i>City Lights</i> (1931)	Group Project 2
	5.05	Seminar	Bodies / Slapstick <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jacques Lecoq, <i>The Moving Body</i>, pp.152–163 • Paul Bouissac, “Slapstick Comedy: Under What Circumstances Can Body Movements be Humorous?,” in <i>The Languages of Humour: Verbal, Visual, and Physical Humour</i> (2018), pp.227–237 	
	6.05	Group Work	Bodies / Slapstick	
	9.05	Discussion Session	Bodies / Slapstick	
4	11.05	Lecture	Power Movie: <i>Dr Strangelove</i> (1964)	

	12.05	Seminar	Power <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terry Eagleton, “The Politics of Humour,” in <i>Humour</i> (Yale University Press, 2019) • Emily Nussbaum, “How Jokes Won the Election: How Do You Fight an Enemy Who’s Just Kidding?” <i>New Yorker</i> January 16, 2017 • Kyle Stevens, “Wet Humor,” <i>Critical Inquiry</i>, September 17, 2018 	Group Project 3
	13.05	Group Work	Power	
	16.05	Discussion Session	Power	
5	18.05	Lecture	Taboo Movie: <i>Four Lions</i> (2004)	Analytical Essay
	19.05	Seminar	Taboo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lindy West, “How to Make a Rape Joke,” <i>Jezebel</i> (July 12, 2012) • Henry Jenkins, “Awkward Conversations about Uncomfortable Laughter,” <i>Flow</i> (2005), pp.# • A. Peter McGraw and C. Warren, “Benign Violation Theory,” in <i>Encyclopedia of Humor Studies</i>, vol.1, pp.75–77 • Rebecca Krefting, “Political Correctness Isn’t Killing 	

			Comedy, It's Making It Better" Zocalo	
	20.05	Group Work	Taboo	
	23.05	Discussion Session	Taboo	
6	25.05	Lecture	Gender Movie: <i>Some Like it Hot</i> (1959)	Group Project 5
	26.05	Seminar	Gender <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebecca Krefting, "When Women Perform Charged Humour: The (Gendered) Politics of Consumption," in <i>All Joking Aside</i>, pp.106–136 • Christopher Hitchens, "Why Women Aren't Funny" 	
	27.05	Group Work	Gender	
	30 .05	Discussion Session	Gender	
7	1.06	Lecture	Religion Movie: <i>The Life of Brian</i> (1979)	Group Project 6
	2.06	Seminar	Religion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christie Davies, "The Danish Cartoons, the Muslims and the New Battle of Jutland," <i>Humour</i> 21: 1 (2008), 1–12 • M.A. Screech, <i>Laughter at the Foot of the Cross</i> (Chicago, 1997), excerpts 	
	3.06	Group Work	Religion	

	6.06	Discussion Session	Religion	
8	8.06	Lecture	Humor Past / Humor Future	24-Hour Test
	9.06	Seminar	Humor Past / Humor Future <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anastasia Denisova, <i>Internet Memes and Society: Social, Cultural, and Political Contexts</i> (Routledge, 2019), chapter 1. 	
	10.06	Discussion	Humor Past / Humor Future	
	13.06	Final Exam		

SAS Policies for Online Courses

Please note the addition and updating of policies to reflect the realities of online teaching in Q4.

Technical Requirements and Responsibilities for Online Education

Professors and students are responsible for ensuring they have access to a computer and a stable Internet connection during all scheduled class meetings. This is to ensure that students get the most out of the online education format. If you have problems with your Internet, smartphones may be used as a backup option (as a wifi hotspot or to participate in class).

Course materials and all assignments will be made available on Canvas; all synchronous class meetings will be conducted over Zoom. All communication about the course and assignments must happen over Canvas or official email. The use of any supplementary platforms (discussion boards etc.) is at the discretion of the instructor.

Professors are required to post all resources for online teaching via Canvas before the start of each week. This includes: Any nonsynchronous lesson material, the invitations for individual Zoom meetings, and any other materials required to complete the course.

All synchronous classes will be recorded and made available via Canvas on the same day for a minimum of one week. These recordings are only for teaching purposes and should not be shared.

Etiquette for Online Classes

Professors and students should join Zoom a few minutes before class in order to have time to solve any technical problems. When you join a class, your microphone will be muted. Individual professors will decide how to run class discussions and whether to enable such features as chat. As a general rule of thumb, you should mute your microphone when you are not speaking.

In seminars, students are required to make themselves visible. If you have concerns about what is visible, then either take the time to “curate” your environment or consider using the background option in Zoom. During lectures, you are welcome to turn off your video.

Students should feel free to contact the professor or Head of Education (d.kontowski@utmn.ru) to discuss any concerns that may arise concerning online delivery of the course (i.e., technical issues, course material availability, access to apps, communication challenges, and changes to syllabus or schedule). Don't wait until course evaluations to draw attention to your concerns!

Technical Emergencies Protocols

Students who have difficulty getting online to attend a synchronous class or complete an assignment, should contact the professor immediately according to the specific instructions provided in the syllabus (i.e., via telephone, SMS, or email). Follow the below instructions concerning making up classes missed due to technical problems.

If your professor is not online for the start of a class session, keep Zoom open and check your email. If the professor does not come on-line or send a message to clarify the situation within 10 minutes after the official starting time, class is cancelled. Both the professor and a designated student should alert the Head of Education about the situation. Missed classes will be rescheduled; update class times to be shared via Canvas and Moodle.

Attendance and Absences

Zoom has an attendance feature that will be used to record attendance. Attendance is required for all synchronous classes or required online activities (i.e., designated asynchronous tasks, timed assignments, group work meetings, etc.) and will be recorded on a grading sheet. Students can miss up to two classes without an excuse; every further absence will see the final mark lowered by 1 point for each class missed (i.e., a student who misses 6 class meetings without prior approval or a valid excuse cannot pass a course). Missing more than 15 minutes of scheduled online class is considered an absence, unless the student has received prior approval from the Head of Education.

If you plan to miss a class due to a legitimate conflict (i.e. attendance of a student conference), you must apply to the instructor for an approved absence at least seven days in advance and CC Head of Education. Without advanced approval, it will count as a missed class.

If you are sick, email all your instructors and Alyona Bunkova (a.bunkova@utmn.ru) as soon as possible to notify them that you will be missing class. They will follow up with you with any necessary arrangements related to your illness.

If you need to miss a class due to something that arises at short notice (i.e., bureaucracy that needs to be dealt with, an emergency at home), email the instructor as soon as possible to notify them about your absence. Should a student have repeated problems with attendance, the instructor will notify the Head of Education.

Making Up Classes Missed for Legitimate Reasons

Students who miss a synchronous class session to a legitimate conflict, an emergency that arises at short notice, or a technical problem will be required to watch the recording of the class and submit a written summary of the key points of the class, including any questions that you have about the content. This should be sent to the instructor via email within 48 hours of the ending of the class in order to receive credit. If a technical problem emergency situation persists beyond 48 hours, an extension may be granted. Students who are sick should watch the videos of missed classes in order to keep up on courses, but they are not required to submit written summaries.

Extensions for Assignments

All assignments must be submitted by their due dates. Extensions will be granted only when ill health, death of a loved one, or personal difficulties of a serious nature near the due date prevent completion of an assignment. As the due dates for assignments are stated in the syllabus, the pressure of other university work or extracurricular activities will not be accepted as a reason for an extension.

If you require an extension, you must write to your instructor at least three working days in advance. Clearly explain your situation and provide any necessary documentation (such as a medical certificate) to Alyona Bunkova. Your instructor should reply to you within one day; you will be notified by email about whether an extension has been granted.

Late Assignments

Late assignments will be penalized by a full grade deduction for each day of lateness. For example, an essay submitted three days late that received a mark of 7 would be reduced to 4. Late assignments will not be accepted once graded assignments are returned or after June 11. The acceptance of late assignments for minor assessments (worth 10 percent or less of the final mark, including minor tasks completed during class hours) is left up to the discretion of individual instructors.

Rescheduling of Classes or Substitution of Instructor

Should a course be unable to meet at its regular time, the instructor will liaise with Alyona Bunkova to approve the change and to find a different time that suits both the instructor and students. Should this occur, all involved will receive an email notification from Alyona Bunkova about the changed schedule and any schedule changes will appear in Modeus. If the instructor requires a substitute to replace them, students will be notified by email.

Grading

SAS uses a ten-point grading system. Grades from 0 to 3 are failing grades. Grades from 4 to 10 are passing grades. 10 and 9 are excellent grades given in exceptional circumstances.

In most courses, SAS faculty are obliged to follow the 7-rule. This may be calculated either as a "median" (the number of grades above 7 and the number of grades below 7 do not differ by more than 1) or an average (the average final grade for all students should fall between 6.50 and 7.49). The 7-rule may be applied to each assignment OR only to the final course marks. Exceptions to this rule are only granted by the Teaching Council.

Examinations

The examination will consist of a 90-minute written test that includes the identification of ten quotations from required course readings and a written essay. The use of any electronic devices is prohibited. The student must: 1) Attribute the given quotations; identify the sections of the texts (such as a chapter) where the quotations are taken from as well as their authors, titles, and year of publication. 2) Based on the given quotations, write an essay in English (1000–1500 words) analyzing semantic relationships between the texts where these quotations are taken from.

Assessment Criteria:

Satisfactory (C, or 3):	Good (B, or 4):	Excellent (A, or 5):
1) All quotations are attributed correctly;	1) all quotations are attributed correctly;	1) all quotations are attributed correctly;
2) The essay is written in English (no less than 1000 words) in accordance with the following requirements: a) in the essay, there is a sequential logic structure (introduction, body, and conclusion); b) the essay demonstrates satisfactory knowledge and understanding of all texts analyzed; c) the essay contains at least five exact quotations, different from the attributed quotations in assignment 1, illustrating the main ideas of the essay and formatted in accordance with the GOST 2008 (State Standard 2008).	2) the essay is written in English (no less than 1000 words) in accordance with the following requirements: a) in the essay, there is a sequential logic structure (introduction, body, and conclusion); b) the essay demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of all texts analyzed; c) the essay contains at least seven exact quotations, different from the attributed quotations in assignment 1, illustrating the main ideas of the essay and formatted in accordance with the GOST 2008 (State Standard 2008).	2) the essay is written in English (no less than 1000 words) in accordance with the following requirements: a) in the essay, there is a sequential logic structure (introduction, body, and conclusion); b) the essay demonstrates excellent knowledge and understanding of all texts analyzed; c) the essay contains at least nine exact quotations, different from the quotations in assignment 1, illustrating the main ideas of the essay and formatted in accordance with the GOST 2008 (State Standard 2008).

Course Evaluations

Toward the end of the quarter, students will be asked to complete an anonymous evaluation of the course. The results of the evaluations will be reviewed by the instructor, the Head of the Education Office, and the Teaching Council in order to improve education at SAS.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to comply with the SAS Academic Integrity Document (see English version [HERE](#) or Russian version [HERE](#)). Cheating, plagiarism, and disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated and *must* be sanctioned by the instructor in accordance with the document. The use of any translation applications (Google Translate etc.) is highly discouraged. Students are required to cite any sources employed in written assignments using the citation style listed in the syllabus.

Online assignments will be “open book,” meaning that you can look at course reading materials and notes while answering the questions. However, the Academic Integrity still applies. That means: You must not communicate with anyone; your answers will be your own work; and you will not use Google Translate. You are discouraged from searching the Internet for answers, as you will run out of time, may risk violation of the Academic Integrity Policy, and will likely do worse than if you simply answer with the knowledge you already have.

Date Syllabus Last Updated: 16.04.20